STUDY PROJECT

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE ARMY CENTRALIZED AND
THE MARINE CORPS DECENTRALIZED LTCOL/COL
COMMAND SELECTION SYSTEMS

BY

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  Command selection at the lieutenant colonel and colonel level is of critical importance to every United States armed service. Each service has its own approach to meet unique requirements; however, in total, the principle involved is achieved through either a centralized (service headquarters controlled) or decentralized (subordinate headquarters controlled) command selection system. The Army uses a centralized, and the Marine Corps uses a decentralized system. The inherent differences in these two divergent methods
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ABSTRACT (continued).

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This paper discusses the background and evolution of centralized command selection, the relevant findings of several subsequent studies to evaluate and refine the system, and special considerations of both Army and Marine command selection. As part of the research effort, numerous interviews were conducted with officers closely associated with both centralized and decentralized command selection. A primary part of this study is a survey questionnaire administered to the U.S. Army War College and Marine Corps Command and General Staff College students. The study found that the vast majority of Army officers surveyed are very confident in the centralized system; however, 67% of the Marine officers surveyed have reservations about decentralized command selection. The paper concludes with an analysis of the research data and recommendations regarding command selection and further research possibilities.

USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

AN ANALYSIS OF THE ARMY CENTRALIZED AND THE MARINE CORPS
DECENTRALIZED LTCOL/COL COMMAND SELECTION SYSTEMS

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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Section I

Introduction

Purpose

This paper will discuss the significant and often controversial subject of command selection at the lieutenant colonel and colonel level within the Army and the Marine Corps. The specific scope of this paper is to determine the relative influence of the Army centralized and the Marine Corps decentralized LtCol/Col command selection systems on the attitude of officers within those services toward command selection and command selection systems. In this case, the centralized and decentralized command selection systems are the independent variables, and the attitude of officers toward command selection and command selection systems is the dependent variable.

Investigative Procedure

There have been several studies within the Department of the Army regarding the overall Officer Personnel Management System (OPMS), which included command selection as an integral part of that system. These studies provide the historical basis and causative factors leading to the Army's adoption of the centralized command selection system and subsequent efforts to refine the system. However, beyond these official studies and

four individual research efforts, each of which addresses centralized command selection in varying degrees, there is a lack of published professional discussion on this subject.

In the civilian sector, there are several published works from the 1970's, such as Gabriel and Savage's Crisis In Command, which are highly critical of the Army following the Vietnam War with the central theme "that the United States Army and its officer corps are in need of significant reform."[1]

Within the Marine Corps, there is only one official order (published in 1984) which mentions command selection, and there are no service-sponsored or individually conducted studies dealing with this subject.

This paper extracts data from those past studies both to provide pertinent background material and to assist in the analysis of new data derived from a survey questionnaire specifically designed for this research paper. Also, numerous interviews were conducted with Army and Marine Corps officers with current or past affiliation and experience with command selection in each service in order to provide a broader depth of understanding of the particular systems.

The survey instrument itself was pretested among a representative group of Army and Marine students of the U.S. Army War College Class of 1988 and refined prior to administration to the target groups. The final questionnaire was administered to 180 combat, combat support, and combat service support regular Army students of the U.S. Army War College Class of 1988 and 135

combat, combat support, and combat service support regular Marine Corps students of the Marine Corps Command and Staff College Class of 1988. The return completion rate for the 180 U.S. Army War College students was 76% (137 of 180). The return completion rate for the 135 Marine Corps Command and General Staff College students was 24% (30 of 123). An analysis of the survey results and recommendations for future research on this subject are contained in Sections IV and V of this paper.

Section II

Background

One of the most significant career progressions and goals for a military officer in the grade of lieutenant colonel and colonel is to be selected for and assigned to an appropriate level command position. Furthermore, it is incumbent upon the individual services, regardless of what type command selection process is employed, to insure that highly qualified commanders are assigned to those critical command billets.

Today, among the four armed services of the United States there are four different command selection systems in practice. However, while each service has its own command selection system designed to fulfill the unique requirements of that service, the four systems can be classified, in principle, into two categories

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- centralized or decentralized command selection. Centralized command selection is administered and controlled by the service headquarters through a competitive selection board procedure that considers all éligible officers by category and selects those officers considered best qualified to command to fill projected command vacancies over a specific period of time. In the decentralized system, the local commanding general selects and assigns officers to available command positions from those eligible and available officers assigned by the service headquarters to the local major command.

The Navy, for example, probably has the most far-reaching centralized selection system of all, which begins with the initial screening for shipboard department head billets at the lieutenant (O-3) and lieutenant commander (O-4) level. The Navy centralized system also includes an executive officer selection process and culminates with the centralized command selection procedure at the commander (O-5) and captain (O-6) level.[2]

The Army has also adopted a highly structured and formalized Centralized Command Selection System (CCSS) at the lieutenant colonel and colonel level. The Army CCSS begins with separate lieutenant colonel and colonel command selection boards to consider eligible officers in the combat, combat support, and combat service support categories. These separate boards convene annually under the cognizance of the service headquarters, review the records of eligible officers, select those officers considered best qualified for command, and rank those officers by command category. Principal command selectees are determined by

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relative standing on the board's command order of merit list and
the available command assignment vacancies projected over the
coming year. Local comanders notify principal and alternate
selectees of their selection; however, only the principal
selectee list is published Army-wide. Principal selectees are
ordered to a specific command as soon as possible after selection
by the service headquarters in accordance with a centrally
administered command assignment slate.[3]

The Air Force and Marine Corps both employ decentralized
command selection systems. For the purposes of this paper, the
Air Forcee system will not be discussed in any detail other than
to describe it as decentralized in character with lieutenant
colonel and colonel command selections made by commanding
generals of major commands and not the service headquarters. The
Marine Corps command selection system is highly decentralized.
Indeed, the only official statement regarding command selection
in the Marine Corps states that " commanding generals are
responsible for assigning battalion/squadron and higher level
commanders from available officers who are best qualified to lead
troops."[4] This policy provides local commanding generals with
great latitude and discretion in the selection of commanders.

Section III

Discussion

While recognizing the inherent differences between the
command selection systems of all four armed services, this paper
will focus on the Army centralized and the Marine Corps
decentralized LtCol/Col command selection systems. Although the
Army and Marine Corps differ in size, mission, and orientation,
command at the lieutenant colonel and colonel level in both
services is similar in career importance, breadth of
responsibility, size, general purpose, and organization.
Therefore, it is not surprising that for almost two hundred
years, ending with the Army's adoption of the CCSS in 1973, the
two services shared the philosophy of decentralized command
selection. What caused the Army to change this long standing
practice?

Evolution of Centralized Command Selection

The genesis of change to the CCSS as a subsystem of the Army
officer management system was the 1970 U.S. Army War College
Study on Military Professionalism. This study was conducted at
the direction of the Army Chief of Staff "to assess the existing
climate of professionalism in today's Army giving particular
attention to the prevailing standards of professional competence
and moral/ethical behavior."[5] This study was a scientific and
careful analysis of an emotional and potentially inflammatory

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subject - the professionalism of the Army officer corps. The

study identified numerous deficiencies involving decentralized

command selection including the perception that it helped to

produce within the Army "an ambitious, transitory commander-

marginally skilled in the complexities of his duties- engulfed in

producing statistical results, fearful of personal failure, too

busy to talk with or listen to his subordinates, and determined

to submit acceptably optimistic reports which reflect faultless

completion of a variety of tasks at the. expense of the sweat and

frustration of his subordinates."[6] The findings of this study

regarding command selection were reflected in recommendations to:

> 1. Centralize command selection for lieutenant
> colonels and colonels to TOE command positions by name
> from the service headquarters after command selection
> board action.
>
> 2. Stabilize command positions at battalion and
> brigade level by establishing a prescribed minimum
> command tour length that takes priority over all other
> reassignments.
>
> 3. Eliminate battalion and brigade command and high
> level staff service from the optimum career patterns
> for combat arms officers.
>
> 4. Reduce or eliminate for all grades below colonel,
> the "nominating" of officers for assignments and the
> honoring of "by name" requests from the field.[7]

As a result of the 1970 US Army War College Study, in October

of that year the Chief of Staff directed that the Deputy Chief of

Staff for Personnel conduct an ambitious omnibus project with the

goal of revamping the Army's system of officer personnel

management. Although the objective was to improve all facets of

officer career management within the Army, the Chief of Staff

left no doubt in his guidance memorandum regarding the emphasis

to be placed on command selection within the overall system when

he stated:

> The first task is to examine our policies and
> procedures with respect to command assignments. We
> must seek to achieve higher quality and greater
> stabililty in command...I want to identify our field
> grade officers best suited to command, to designate
> them explicitly as such...[8]

Consequently, in June 1971 the Deputy Chief of Staff for

Personnel promulgated to the Army officer corps the new concept

for officer personnel management - Officer Personnel Management

System (OPMS). It is significant that this initial introduction

of OPMS to the field was in the form of a large study report

identifying the negative implications of the ongoing management

system on officer professionalism, proposing major revolutionary

changes to improve the system, and soliciting comments from the

field to gain acceptance of the OPMS concept. It is also

important to note that this document for the first time publicly

stated to the Army officer corps that the My Lai incident and the

results of its subsequent investigation caused the Chief of Staff

to initiate the efforts leading to the improvement of Army

professionalism through the new OPMS concept and its components,

which included centralized command selection.[9] Under the

proposed system, officers in the grade of major would be screened

upon eligibility for selection to Command and General Staff

College and designated for future command or future staff duty at

the lieutenant colonel level. This initial proposed system also

included that promotion boards for selection to lieutenant colonel and colonel would also designate as commanders those officers best qualified for future command.[10] These proposals would have directly linked command selection to intermediate level school and promotion. However, neither of these proposed versions of centralized command selection were included in the final version of CCSS.

Less than three years later, after significant revision and refinement of the initial proposal, the OPMS was instituted as official policy with the publication of Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-3. The Army CCSS, with no major changes from the current system in practice today, has remained an important component of Army OPMS. The essence of command selection within the larger framework of OPMS was summarized in the closing paragraph of Chapter 7, Command Selection System:

> 7-8 The Challenge of Command. While there are numerous positions of high responsibility, other than command, in all specialties, it is nevertheless true that successful command is a hallmark of military professionalism. Thus, command continues to be a much sought after and rewarding assignment. Because of limited command opportunity, many highly qualified officers may not be afforded command during peacetime, and will make their contribution to the service in other positions of responsibility. These officers should understand that nonselection for command in current circumstances does not diminish their capacity as a military professional.[11]

The clear, intended message to Army officers was that even though an officer failed command selection he could still contribute to the service and have a rewarding and successful career in his alternate specialty or functional area outside of the primary branch. The concept of primary and alternate specialties has

remained a quintessential element of OPMS. In brief, through the
initial years of service officers are assigned one of 16 branches
and progress toward and achieve initial branch qualification. By
completion of seven years commissioned service, all officers have
the opportunity to select their career pattern by choosing a
functional area, which often involves graduate school training
within the chosen technical field. Thereafter, officers receive
assignments within the branch or, if a functional area is
designated, a mix of branch and functional area assignments.
Designation of functional area qualification is normally
encouraged based on the needs of the Army to meet overall force
structure skill requirements in branch and technical areas.[12]
The career pattern would procede on this "dual track" with,
ideally, interruptions for professional military school and
command assignment, based on the outcome of centralized selection
in each case, at the appropriate time in the career development
process.

RETO Study

In 1978, a major Army study entitled Review of Education and
Training for Officers (RETO) detailed several major, but not
surprising, findings regarding the centralized command selection
system. First, command selection and successful completion of
command assignment at the lieutenant colonel level is a critical
factor in future selection for senior service college and

promotion. For example, in a survey conducted as part of the RETO Study, 95% of all colonels responding indicated that they had had battalion and/or brigade command, and of those colonels in the combat arms 98% had commanded at the battalion and/or brigade level. Second, the study identified three possible negative influences of the CCSS:

1. Elimination from the service of certain qualified officers without providing them the opportunity to prove themselves.

2. Nonselection for promotion of talented officers, whose skills are not commensurate with command selection but are nonetheless required in other responsible and necessary positions within the force structure (the equation of no command equals no promotion).

3. Early demotivation of very capable and talented officers who fail command selection.[13]

1979 USAWC Study and 1984 Army OPMS Study

Two other subsequent studies provided further insight into the perceptions of Army officers toward the CCSS. The 1979 U.S. Army War College Study on Military Professionalism provided the single relevant finding that in response to the statement "Command board selects best commanders" the field was split nearly evenly with 31% not sure, 34% positive, and 35% negative.[14] Apparently, total confidence in the CCSS was not demonstrated at that time.

However, the 1984 Army Functional Study of the OPMS, which was far broader in scope than the 1979 USAWC Study with a random sample of over 17,000 officers (excluding warrant and special

branch officers) and several thousand interviews, reported that
"Many senior officers, active and retired, say the centralized
command selection process may need fine tuning, but it is miles
ahead of the "old boy" system of 12 years ago."[15]   However,
this study indicated that 81% of the surveyed field grade
officers felt that command boards select the best personnel
records, not necessarily the best commanders. Further, although
command opportunity is about 25% for lieutenant colonels and 20%
for colonels, surveyed field grade officers indicated:

- 64% expect to command at battalion level or higher.

- 70% feel command is the most important measure of
success in their branch.

- 87% say successful command is prerequisite for
promotion to colonel.

- 60% believe if not picked the first-time eligible,
they have little chance of ever being subsequently
selected for command.[16]

Special Considerations of Army and Marine Command Selection

As previously stated by the 1984 OPMS Study, command
opportunity in the Army is about 25% for lieutenant colonel and
20% for colonel . While these figures may generally hold true,
the selection rate varies significantly among branches.[17] By

comparison, potential command opportunity within the Fleet Marine Force (operating forces) also varies widely among occupational specialties with the following examples provided:[18]

LtCol   Probability of Command (24 month tour)
Infantry..............20.6
Artillery.............28.8
Aviation..............41.6

Col
Infantry..............9.5
Artillery.............12.7
Aviation..............30.3

It must be stressed that these command opportunity figures would be even higher if we included, as the Army does, other command categories in addition to the operating forces. The command opportunity factor alone has been said to explain why the Marine Corps has not instituted a centralized command selection system. Nevertheless, these figures on comparative probability of command do not appear to support a conclusive denial of centralized command selection solely on this basis. It is recognized, however, that certain stipulations may be required within a Marine centralized system for exceptionally small occupational fields such as armor officers.

In both systems, assignment officers at the service headquarters have a marked influence on the careers of all officers with every assignment decision contributing to the summary evaluation leading them to be considered either qualified or not qualified for command selection at the lieutenant colonel level. Also, commanding officers of those young officers in

their formative years and throughout their careers will have a strong impact on the direction of those aspiring careers. These two common influencing factors, for the purposes of this paper, will be considered to be equal in both services.

It could also be argued that the Marine Corps currently has, at least to some degree, a form of centralized command selection in that all lieutenant colonel and colonel assignments are ultimately approved by a flag-rank officer at Headquarters Marine Corps. While this is certainly true, the perception may be that such an unstructured system provides an overly narrow perspective considering what is at stake in sum for the Marine Corps, the commands involved, and those officers desiring to command.

Probably the greatest plus for the Marine system is that it provides the local commanding general with the opportunity to evaluate all potential lieutenant colonel and colonel commanders in staff assignments prior to deciding who will command his subordinate units. This is a definite advantage; however, it is also dependent upon the timing of assignment officers making qualified potential commanders available at the right moment, and it also places at least some doubt and apprehension in the minds of potential commanders, who wonder if they will ever "get the call."

The Army system with its centralized board action does have the disadvantage of appearing to be indiscriminate from other selection processes by selecting those "best qualified" for command on the same basis and criteria as other boards select

officers for promotion and military schools. As one writer noted in his 1982 critique/study of CCSS, "guidance to the fiscal 1982 lieutenant colonels' command board stated that 'attendance at a command and staff college is not a prerequisite for command selection'; however, only 2 of 283 selected were without this break-point."[19] Indeed, this was also noted by the 1984 OPMS Study which pointed out that, although the percentage of promotable officers selected for command has fluctuated widely over the years, about 50% to 60% of lieutenant colonel command selectees and 30% to 40% of colonel command selectees were promotable officers command selected the first-time eligible. Consequently, the Army Chief of Staff directed that, starting with the command boards meeting in the fall of 1984 to select LtCol/Col commanders for fiscal year 1986, no more than 10 percent of those selected could come from the first year eligibles (officers on the most recently published promotion list).[20]

It can be seen that the Army embraced the OPMS and centralized command selection as a reaction to the troubled aftermath of the Vietnam War when the standards of the service, as a whole, and the professionalism and leadership of the officer corps, in particular, were under severe criticism. Centralized command selection was directed toward elimination of favortism and the development of more competitive fairness and positive direction in officer career progression by establishing an automatic procedure within an open framework to identify, select,

and assign the most talented and capable commanders to command positions. The Marine Corps, on the other hand, has retained the decentralized command selection system, which in its own way attempts to accomplish the same end of assigning qualified commanders to command positions. Through the following analysis of survey questionnaire results this paper will attempt to measure and evaluate the attitude of officers within each service toward these different means of accomplishing a common goal and will conclude with recommendations regarding those findings.

Section IV

Survey Results and Analysis

Survey Group Data

The command selection systems survey was administered to the 180 regular Army officers students of the U.S. Army War College (USAWC) Class of 1988 and the 123 regular Marine Corps officer students of the U.S. Marine Corps Command and General Staff College (MCCGSC) Class of 1988. Both groups were administered the same survey instrument.

General data relating to each survey group is as follows:

	USAWC	MCCGSC
Total Survey	180	123
Respondents	137 (76%)	30 (24%)
Combat Arms	76 (56%)	14 (47%)
Combat Support	29 (21%)	12 (40%)
Combat Service Support	32 (23%)	4 (13%)
Col	14 (10%)	N/A
LtCol	123 (90%)	1 (.03%)
Maj	N/A	29 (97%)
Command Experience	135 (99%Bn)	30 (100%Co)

Comment: Survey response for both groups was on a voluntary basis. The high response from the U.S. Army War College (76%) may have been attributable to the fact that the study was being conducted within the institution and was endorsed by the War College. The MCCGSC, on the other hand, stressed the voluntary nature of response to the survey, which may account for the 24% response rate.

Also, it must be noted that 99% of the USAWC respondents had successfully completed a command tour at the battalion level.

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Therefore, all but 2 of the 137 Army respondents had been selected for command by the Centralized Command Selection System. The two USAWC students without battalion level command indicated that their branch had no battalion level command equivalent. Considering that the command opportunity for Army LtCols is about 25%, the USAWC group command selection rate of 100% of those eligible for command is extraordinary.

Responses to Survey Questions

1. Question: In your service today, how important is each of the factors listed below in determining the selection of LtCol/Col commanders?

		% Important	
		USAWC	MCCGSC
a.	Technical competence	86	73
b.	Tactical competence	85	70
c.	Demonstrated leadership ability	96	90
d.	Professional military education	58	37
e.	Advanced degree	15	0
f.	Prior command and operational experience	93	67
g.	Professional reputation	68	73
h.	Speaking and writing ability	55	50
i.	Being known by senior leaders	35	47
j.	Past performance in key "high visibility staff assignments	53	57

k. Being in the "right" place at   35   50
    the "right" time

l. Ranking in top one-third of peer   78   57
    group

m. Past performance in service of   29   17
    flag officer

Comment: In this case, the responses are remarkably similar but

do illustrate certain differences between centralized and

decentralized command selection. Both groups picked

"Demonstrated leadership ability" as the most important factor in

command selection. The USAWC group selected "Prior command and

operational experience" (93%) as a close second indicating that

operational experience is very important toward command selection

in the Army, while only 67% of the MCCGSC group felt that this

factor was important.

Both groups placed relatively equal importance on the

factors of "Technical competence", "Tactical competence", and

"Professional reputation". Although the MCCGSC ranked

"Professional reputation" (73%) equal or nearly so with

"Technical and Tactical competence", the USAWC group placed

"Ranking in top one-third of peer group" (78%) as more important

than "Professional reputation" (68%). This would seem to

indicate that the MCCGSC leans toward the more subjective

evaluation criteria such as "Professional reputation", while the

USAWC group places more emphasis on the more objective,

measurable criteris such as "Ranking in top one-third of peer

group". Given the differences in the two command selection

processes, this in not surprising.

The MCCGSC placed slightly more emphasis on the true factors of chance: "Being in the right place at the right time" and "Being known by senior leaders". This again would point out the system differences in that these factors have less significance in the centralized as compared to the decentralized command selection systems. To support this finding, several of the USAWC responses provided written comments that these factors were important only in relation to selection for assignments that would lead to qualification for command selection and not significant in the command selection board action.

Both groups placed nearly equal emphasis on "Speaking and writing ability" and " Past performance in key 'high visibility' staff assignments" and also placed the least importance on "Past performance in service of flag officer" and "Advanced degree".

2. Question: Please rank the LtCol/Col assignment categories listed below in their order of priority, as you feel they should be rated, for assignment of "best qualified" officers. Where should your service assign the "best" LtCols and Cols? Mark number 1 next to the category that should receive the highest priority, number 2 by the second priority, and so forth.

% USAWC/MCCGSC

	1	2	3	4	5	6
a.Joint and combined staff	4/0	18/23	25/30	31/30	19/13	2/0
b.Service headquarters	2/0	17/20	27/20	26/30	24/27	4/7
c.Governmental agencies	.7/0	2/0	4/0	8/10	18/37	68/50
d.Operational unit staff	.7/7	23/37	24/37	20/13	23/3	10/3

	% USAWC/MCCGSC					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
e. Operational unit command	94/97	6/3	0	0	0	0
f. Other command	3/10	41/17	20/13	14/17	12/13	11/23

Median Values:	USAWC	MCCGSC
a. Joint and Combined Staff	4	3
b. Service headquarters	4	4
c. Governmental agencies	6	6
d. Operational unit staff	4	3
e. Operational unit command	1	1
f. Other command	3	3

Comment: There were four variations of this question in the survey. Each question asked the respondent to rank the same assignment categories in order of priority; however, the questions differed by asking that the rankings be made as follows:

> - as you feel they should be rated for assignment of "best qualified" officers. Where should your service assign the "best" LtCols and Cols?

> - as your service rates them for assignment of "best qualified" LtCols and Cols. Where does your service assign the "best" LtCols and Cols?

> - as you feel they should be rated with regard to qualification for promotion. Which assignments do you think should most qualify a LtCol or Col for promotion?

> - as your service rates them with regard to qualification for promotion. Which assignments does your service consider most qualify a LtCol or Col for promotion?

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Nevertheless, since there were very minor differences in the responses to the four variations of the question (tenths of percentage points and less), the results of all the variations of the question will not be reported. It can be concluded, however, that both groups felt no difference in the priorities they and their services place on assignment categories.

Both groups overwhelmingly selected "Operational unit command" as the first choice (94% USAWC and 97% MCCGSC). Both groups agreed that command is the most important assignment and should receive priority in every respect. The USAWC group selected "Other command" as its second choice (41%) indicating that almost all commands are centrally assigned and considered equally important in theory under the Army system. In contrast, the MCCGSC group picked "Operational unit staff" second, closely followed by "Joint and combined staff" as the next most important assignments. The Marine group did not consider "Other command" (17%) as a high priority assignment.

3. Question: In general, the centralized and decentralized command selection systems are:

    a. The USAWC group associated the centralized system with the following:

- Well-defined	97%
- Fair	97%
- Unemotional	95%
- Consistent	97%
- Unbiased	99%
- Careerism	51% (18% neutral)

b. The MCCGSC group associated the centralized system
with the following:
- Well-defined   80%
- Fair   73%
- Unemotional   80%
- Consistent   77%
- Unbiased   80%
- Careerism   73%

Comment: Both groups supported positive word descriptions of the

centralized system with the USAWC group in the very high (95-99%)

margin and the MCCGSC in the lower (73-80%), but still quite

positive, range. The only negative word description of the

centralized system was "Careerism" with 51% of the USAWC and 73%

of the MCCGSC group associating that term more with the

centralized than the decentralized system.

4. Question: In my service, the command selection system at the

LtCol/Col level is: (select one response)

	% Agree	
	USAWC	MCCGSC
a. not a significant issue and requires no changes	85	33.3
b. in need of some improvement	13	53.3
c. in need of major revision	2	13.3

Comment: The 85% USAWC return supporting the centralized system

is understandable considering that 99% of the USAWC group has

successfully passed command selection. However, this result does

support the previously mentioned 1984 OPMS Study finding that the

centralized system was significantly better than pre-OPMS

(decentralized command selection).

In the MCCGSC group, one-third (33.3%) supported the

statement that command selection in the Marine Corps was "not a significant issue and required no changes", while 67% said that the system was "in need of some improvement" (53.3%) or "in need of major revision" (13.3%).

5. Question: In my service, command selection at the LtCol/Col level is: (select one response)

		% Agree	
		USAWC	MCCGSC
a.	unimportant and not significant toward future promotion or other career goals	0	0
b.	important and significant toward future promotion and other career goals	16	50
c.	critical for future promotion and other career goals	39	33
d.	mandatory for the highest probability of promotion and other career goals	45	17

Comment: Both groups agree that command selection is a substantial factor toward the achievement of future promotion and other career goals. In the USAWC group, 84% felt that command selection was "critical" (39%) or "mandatory" (45%) compared to 50% of the MCCGSC (33% for "critical" and 17% for "mandatory"). The 84% USAWC result supports the 1984 OPMS Study finding that 87% of surveyed officers felt that successful command is a prerequisite for promotion to colonel.

6. Question: Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? In my service, if an officer does not command with his peer group at the LtCol level this means:

		% Agree	
		USAWC	MCCGSC
a.	nothing significant in terms of future career potential	6	3
b.	nothing significant if he had another important billet during that time and he was not available for command assignment	20	53
c.	there were not enough command assignments available at that time, and he may yet be selected for command	43	53
d.	he should actively solicit for command assignment	32	47
e.	he was not considered "best qualified" for command, and his promotion chances and future career potential are low	66	37
f.	he should realize that he has reached terminal grade and consider retirement	23	13

Comment: These results support conformity with the existing command selection systems of the two services as follows:

- 53% of the MCCGSC group said that non-selection was not significant "if he had another important billet during that time and was not available for command assignment". This is not possible in the Army since command assignment is mandatory and automatic for selectees. Therefore, only 20% of the USAWC group agreed with the statement.

- Almost one-half (47%) of the MCCGSC group agreed that "he should actively solicit for command assignment." Again, since this is not possible in the centralized system, only 32% of the USAWC group agreed.

- A total of 66% of the USAWC group agreed that "he was not considered 'best qualified' for command, and his promotion chances and future career potential are low." Since this statement and 'best qualified'

relates more to the centralized system, only 37% of the MCCGSC agreed.

7. Question: Do you feel that successful completion of a LtCol command tour should be a prerequisite for selection to Col level command? Why or why not?

	%	
	USAWC	MCCGSC
a. Yes	75	39
b. No	25	61

Comment: The USAWC group supported this statement by a 3:1 margin. In most cases, they referred to the requirement for "command experience at the battalion level" as justification. Once again, the profile of this group as 99% successful LtCol commanders must be considered as a possible influencing factor. The MCCGSC 61% in non-agreement predominantly referred to "lack of adequate number of command billets" and "arbitrary" nature of decentralized command selection as reasons for non-concurrence.

8. Question: What do you feel is the greatest advantage of the centralized command selection system? What is the greatest disadvantage of this system?

    a. USAWC: This group was overwhelmingly supportive of the advantages of the centralized system. Characteristic comments were as follows:

    - selects "best qualified" to command

    - is the most fair, unbiased system

    - provides equal opportunity for all

    - provides automatic availability of selectees

    - eliminates the "good old boy" influence

- assigns the best talent service-wide to most important billets

The disadvantages were characterized as follows:

- selects best personnel records, not always best commanders; may lose some good commanders

- attaches overly negative stigma to non-selectees

- is highly impersonal

- equates command selection board with promotion board, thereby insuring that promotables are command selected- this results in some young but junior, inexperienced commanders

- may emphasize "careerism" as the method to "meet the gates" for command qualification

b. MCCGSC: Comments from this group regarding advantages to the centralized system were as follows:

- could end or limit negative effects of "careerism"

- is a fair system with known rules

- provides equal opportunity to all

- limits "gool old boy" influence and favoritism

- will establish commander and staff officer career tracks

Disadvantages of the centralized system were as follows:

- selects best records only

- may divide Marine Corps into "A-Team" of commanders and "B-Team" of non-commanders

- curtails discretion of local commanding generals in selecting subordinate commanders

- may encourage "careerism"

Comment: The responses from both groups indicated the high degree of emotionalism and divergent opinion regarding command selection. What was seen an an advantage to some respondents was

a negative factor to others and vice versa.

9. Question: What do you feel is the greatest advantage of the decentralized command selection system? What is the greatest disadvantage of this system?

a. USAWC: This group listed few, in some cases no, advantages to this system. The only advantage could be summarized as follows:

- allows commanding general to select subordinate commanders; builds teamwork

The disadvantages listed were basically the opposite of the advantages of the centralized system. Paramount among these were the following terms:

- is unfair, no equal opportunity

- encourages favoritism, "good old boyism", cronyism, inbreeding, incest, etc.

- is personality dependent

- may force commanding general to select the "best of the worst" if top quality officers are not available in the organization

b. MCCGSC: The advantages and disadvantages listed by this group have already been mentioned. As a group, the most popular advantage was allowing the local commanding general to select his subordinate commanders based on observed performance and personal knowledge.

10. Question: In your opinion, how could your service's command selection system be improved? Please provide any other comments that you feel should be considered in this paper.

a. USAWC: The overall comments were dramatically in favor of the centralized system. Some other interesting comments were as follows:

- "Keep secondary zone promotions to a minimum and let the wiser and more experienced senior officers command."

- "Command is not the only designator of a meaningful or successful career."

- "Cpts-Majs who have command potential should be recognized early."

- "It would be better if less pressure were on officers not selected."

- "Centralized selection will only work well as long as we have a credible OER (Officer Evaluation Report) system, which we now have."

- "An interesting area may be the process the Army follows for "slating" officers selected for command. As an example, I was victimized by one policy over another, i.e., the command I was slated for was eventually given to a female officer to meet "joint domicile" considerations."

- "Enforcement of senior rater profile standards still is weak and has an adverse impact on the ability of boards to objectively compare different officers using this most important part of the OER."

- "Centralized system has a tendency to "overemphasize" comand- seems to dilute the importance of many difficult, important assignments in various staff positions."

- "Without command, chances for promotion diminish accordingly."

- "It would be interesting to see a contrast of %
successful commanders selected before centralized and
after centralized, or centralized and decentralized.
'Successful' can be those who survived, those who were
promoted, or.....?"

- "There are 'cut points' in any system. Miss any of
these milestones and you should get the message."

- "Look hard at not pushing 'deep selects' into
command just to keep them moving. Command is the care
and training of soldiers not just a 'ticket punch' on
the way to being a CINC."

b. MCCGSC: The following comments, both positive and

negative, were provided:

- "USMC should look closely at the Army centralized
command selection system."

- "Some deserving individuals, through no fault of
their own, do not get an opportunity to serve in
command billets."

- "Come up with a centralized system."

- "If we went to a selection board for command,
'careerism' would be worse and would be seen earlier in
an officer's career."

- "Assignment of commanders by a board would be yet
another example of HQMC (Headquarters Marine Corps)
taking away the flexibility of the local commanding
generals."

- "A board of officers in D.C. is only working with
part of the whole picture. The commander in the field
is the only one qualified to make the final choice."

- "Centralized system would provide a better overview,
gauge, or selection process."

- "Command selection is non-existent, it is a command
assignment system!"

- "Establish one!" (centralized system)

- "USMC- is there a command selection system? I
understand that the LtCol monitor now says that only
those LtCols who are 'best qualified' for command are
going to return to the FMF (Fleet Marine
Force/operating forces), not the LtCol who has been out
of the FMF the longest. Is the monitor now making

command selection? What criteria is he using for 'best qualified'?"

- "There is a very strong political aspect to obtaining command. The so-called 'buddy-system' or 'brotherhood' connection cannot be dismissed."

- "I would like to see centralized command selection."

- "It is impossible for a board looking at fitness reports to determine who is 'best qualified' for command."

Section V

Recommendations

General

As can be seen, particularly by the written responses to
open-ended questions, command selection is a controversial and
provocative issue. Furthermore, every officer's judgment of what
specific criteria identifies another officer as a potential
successful commander is a unique, subjective, personal, and often
emotional evaluation.

The USAWC sample is strongly supportive of the centralized
system, as is the Army officer corps as a whole. Even with the
identified limitations of centralization, the USAWC group
recommended some improvement or areas for further study, but no
revolutionary changes from the principles and procedures of
centralized selection. The overall result of 85% of the USAWC
group supporting the statement that in the Army "command
selection is not a significant issue and requires no changes" is
indicative of the confidence placed in the current system.

The MCCGSC sample, although limited in quantitative
response, tends to support the finding that command selection may
be an issue in the Marine Corps. The survey result that 67% of
the MCCGSC group felt that in the Marine Corps command selection
is "in need of some improvement" or "major revision" reinforces
this statement. Furthermore, the written comments tend to
highlight a marked degree of concern toward command selection in

the Marine Corps- at least among this admittedly small sample.
Moreover, the results of this study appear to indicate a need for
a more thorough review of command selection to determine if these
identified "negativisms" are persistent throughout the Marine
Corps field grade officer population.

Recommendations

1. That a further, in-depth study be conducted to survey and
analyze the attitudes of the Army and Marine Corps Command and
General Staff College students, and the U.S. Army War College,
and the Marine Corps Top Level School students toward command
selection and command selection systems. This study could
provide more insight to the evaluation by comparing groups of
officers within each service with relatively the same experience
levels, career achievements, and aspirations.

2. That an in-service study be conducted to survey and analyze
the attitudes of Marine Corps officers in the grades of Major
through General regarding command selection. This study could
identify the extent of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the
present command selection process.

3. That a further study be conducted to survey and analyze the
comparative attitudes of Army command selectees and non-selectees
toward command selection.

33

4. That a further study be conducted to survey and analyze the comparative attitudes of current and former LtCol/Col level commanders in the Army and Marine Corps toward command selection.

5. That a further study be conducted to analyze the reasons for LtCol/Col level command "success" and "failure" within the Army and Marine Corps. A survey of current and former Army and Marine Corps commanding generals and brigade/regimental commanders should be included to determine their evaluation of subordinate commanders and the command selection system that produced them.

6. That the Marine Corps consider publishing an official policy document that outlines the criteria and procedures for selecting officers to LtCol and Col level command positions.

Endnotes

1.   Richard A. Gabriel and Paul L. Savage, Crisis In Command: Mismanagement in the Army (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), p. x.

2.   Interview with Vice Admiral Joseph Metcalf III, US Navy (Ret), former Deputy to the Assistant Chief of Naval Personnel for Personnel Planning and Programming and Director of the General Planning and Programming Division (US Army War College: 2 December 1987).

3.   Headquarters, Department of the Army, OPMD Orientation and Counseling Guide (Washington: October 1986), pp. 164-170.

4.   Headquarters Marine Corps, Marine Corps Order 1300.32: Continuity of Command (Washington: 19 November 1984), pp. 1-2.

5.   US Army War College, Study on Military Professionalism (Carlisle Barracks, PA: 30 June 1970), p. 3.

6.   Ibid., p. iv.

7.   Ibid., pp. 42-43.

8.   Office of the Chief of Staff of the Army, Chief of Staff Memorandum to Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, Guidance for Improving Army Professionalism (Washington: 16 October 1970), p. 2.

9.   Headquarters, Department of the Army, The Officer Personnel Management System (OPMS) (Washington: 25 June 1971), p. 1.

10.   Ibid., pp. C-5-1 - C-5-5.

11.   Ibid., pp. 7-2 - 7-3.

12.   Headquarters, Department of the Army, Army Pamphlet 600-3: Commissioned Officer Professional Development and Utilization (Washington: 30 April 1986), pp. 5-10.

13.   Headquarters, Department of the Army, A Review of Education and Training for Officers (Washington: 30 June 1978), vol. 4, p. R-2-2.

14.   US Army War College, Study on Military Professionalism (Carlisle Barracks, PA: 1979), Executive Summary, pp. 9-10.

15.   Headquarters, Department of the Army, Functional Study of the Officer Personnel Management System (Washington: 1 October 1984), vol. 1, p. ii.

16.   Ibid., p. vii-4-A.

17.   James L. Estep, "Paper Commanders: Is Centralized Command Selection the Best Way?", Army Magazine, April 1982, p. 20.

18.   Data extracted from information provided by Headquarters Marine Corps, Manpower Management Information Systems Branch, December 1987.

19.   Estep, op. cit.

20.   Functional Study of the Officer Personnel Management System, op. cit., p. vii-4-A.

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COMMAND SELECTION SYSTEMS SURVEY

1. Please mark those categories that apply to you.

a. Service:____Army____Marine

b. Status:____Active Duty____Retired

c. Grade:____O-4____O-5____O-6____O-7____O-8

d. Military Specialty:____Combat Arms
                        ____Combat Support
                        ____Combat Service Support

e. Command Experience:
                        ____Company
                        ____Battalion/Air Squadron
                        ____Battalion Landing Team
                        ____Regiment/Air Group
                        ____Marine Amphibious Unit
                        ____Brigade
                        ____Marine Amphibious Brigade
                        ____Division/Air Wing
                        ____Other command (please specify)

2. In your service today, how important is each of the factors listed below in determining the selection of LtCol/Col commanders? A scale from 1 (not important) to 5 (extremely important) is listed below. If you feel that the factor is extremely important, pick a number from the far right of the scale and write it in the space beside the item. If you feel the factor is not important, select a number from the left side of the scale and write it in the space beside the item. If you feel that the importance is somewhere between the two extremes, pick a number from the scale that best shows your opinion.
extremely unimportant 1   2   3   4   5   extremely important

a.____Technical Competence
b.____Tactical Competence
c.____Demonstrated leadership ability
d.____Professional Military Education (formal schools)
e.____Advanced Degree (civilian education)
f.____Prior command and operational experience
g.____Professional reputation
h.____Speaking and writing ability
i.____Being known by senior leaders
j.____Past performance in key "high visibility" staff assignments
k.____Being in the "right" place at the "right" time
l.____Ranking in top one-third of peer group
m.____Past performance in service of flag officer

3. Please rank the LtCol/Col assignment categories listed below in their order of priority, as you feel they should be rated, for assignment of "best qualified" officers. Where should your service assign the "best" LtCols and Cols? Mark number 1 next to the category that should receive the highest priority, number 2 by the second priority, and so forth.

a._____Joint and Combined Staff
b._____Service headquarters
c._____Governmental Agencies
d._____Operational unit staff
e._____Operational unit command
f._____Other command (training unit,etc.)

4. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements by placing an x in the space beside each statement with which you agree.

a.____Any reasonably qualified LtCol/Col should be considered for command assignment
b.____LtCols/Cols with limited previous command and operational unit staff experience should not be considered for command assignment
c.____Only the top one-third of the LtCol/Col peer group based on overall performance should be considered by the local commanding general for command assignment
d.____LtCol/Col command selection should be based on a merit rank order list based on overall performance and centrally administered by the service headquarters

5. Listed below are several pairs of opposite words that could be used to describe command selection systems. Between the words in each pair are several blanks. Between each word pair, mark a D in the blank that best describes how you feel about the decentralized system and mark a C in the blank that best describes how you feel about the centralized system. For example, in "a" below, if you feel that the centralized system is well-defined and the decentralized system is vague, place a C in a block toward well-defined and a D in a block toward vague. In the blanks between each word pair, you will then have a D and a C to show your opinion.
In general, the centralized and decentralized command selection systems are:

a.Well-defined___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___Vague
b.Fair ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___Unfair
c.Formal ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___Informal
d.Realistic ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___Idealistic
e.Unemotional ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___Emotional
f.Consistent ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___Inconsistent
g.Unbiased ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___Biased
h.Thoughtful ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___Arbitrary
i.Objective ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___Subjective
j.Careerism ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___Non-careerism

6. Please rank the LtCol/Col assignment categories listed below in their order of importance, as you feel they should be rated, with regard to qualification for promotion. Which assignments do you think should most qualify a LtCol or Col for promotion? Mark number 1 next to the most important, number 2 by the next most important, and so forth.

a. ___ Joint and Combined Staff
b. ___ Service headquarters
c. ___ Governmental agencies
d. ___ Operational unit staff
e. ___ Operational unit command
f. ___ Other command (training unit,etc.)

7. Do you feel that successful completion of a LtCol command tour should be a prerequisite for selection to Col level command? Why or why not? Please comment.

8. One potential benefit of the centralized system is that it forces the assignment of the "best qualified" officers to command positions at appropriate times in their careers. What do you feel is the greatest advantage of the centralized command selection system? What is the greatest disadvantage of this system?

9. One potential benefit of the decentralized system is that it allows the commanding general to select commanders from officers known to him. What do you feel is the greatest advantage of the decentralized command selection system? What is the greatest disadvantage of this system?

10. In my service, the command selection system at the LtCol/Col level is (select and circle one response)

a. not a significant issue and requires no changes
b. in need of some improvement
c. in need of major revision

11. In your opinion, how could your service's command selection system be improved? Please elaborate.

12. In my service, command selection at the LtCol/Col level is (select and circle one response)

a. unimportant and not significant toward future promotion or other career goals

b. important and significant toward future promotion and cther career goals

c. critical for future promotion and other career goals

d. mandatory for the highest probability of promotion and other career goals

13. Please pick a number from the scale below to show how much
you agree or disagree with each statement and write that number
in the space provided in front of each statement.

Scale
1= Strongly agree
2= Agree
3= Neutral
4= Disagree
5= Strongly disagree

In my service, if an officer does not command with his peer group
at the LtCol level this means

a._____nothing significant in terms of future career potential

b._____nothing significant if he had another important billet
during that time and was not available for command assignment

c._____there were not enough command assignments available at
that time, and he may yet be selected for command

d._____he should actively solicit for a command assignment

e._____he was not considered "best qualified" for command, and
his promotion chances and future career potential are low

f._____he should realize that he has reached terminal grade and
consider retirement

14. Please rank the LtCol/Col assignment categories listed below
in their order of priority, as your service rates them, for
assignment of "best qualified" officers. Where does your service
assign the "best" LtCols and Cols? Mark number 1 next to the
category that receives the highest priority, number 2 by the
second priority, and so forth.

a._____Joint and Combined Staff
b._____Service headquarters
c._____Governmental Agencies
d._____Operational unit staffs
e._____Operational unit command
f._____Other command (training unit, etc.)

15. Please rank the LtCol/Col assignment categories listed below in their order of importance, as your service rates them, with regard to qualification for promotion. Which assignments does your service consider most qualify a LtCol or Col for promotion? Mark number 1 next to the most important, number 2 by the next most important, and so forth.

a._____Joint and Combined Staff
b._____Service headquarters
c._____Governmental agencies
d._____Operational unit staff
e._____Operational unit command
f._____Other command (training unit, etc.)

16. Please write any other comments that you feel I should consider in my paper. Thank you for your help!!